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autopoiesis and cyber-semiotics

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Ranulph Glanville and How to Live the Cybernetics of Unknowing:

A Festschrift Celebration of the Influence of a Researcher

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Issue poet: Kathleen Forsythe.

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Cybernetics & Human Knowing

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Cybernetics and Human Knowing is a quarterly international multi- and trans-disciplinary journal focusing on second-order cybernetics and cybersemiotic approaches.

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Foreword: Ranulph Glanville and How to Live the Cybernetics of Unknowing

A Festschrift Celebration of the Influence of a Researcher

Phillip Guddemi, Søren Brier and Louis H. Kauffman

It is not customary to use journals for festschrifts. But we have made an exception with our columnist—and contributor to the journal through the years—Ranulph Glanville. Since our journal began, his work has created great academic interest among our readers, and we wanted researchers from the many areas he touched with his work to reflect on the nature and impact of this unusual engaged thinker, who combined breadth and depth in a very original way throughout his life and practice.

This tribute issue to the effects of Ranulph Glanville's life work began as a celebration of his life. Søren Brier and Lou Kauffman sent out the call for contributions on October 28 of last year, while Ranulph was still alive, though they were aware of his terminal illness. Allow us to reprint most of the call for contributions' first paragraph:

> Ranulph Glanville is about to retire from his work for the Cybernetics & Human Knowing journal … He will also retire from great parts of his enormous fan of work for associations such as the ASC, conferences and other journals. We therefore thought we would commemorate his gigantic work with a festschrift commenting on the significance of what he has done.

This issue is the result of that call, but of course made much more poignant by Ranulph's subsequent untimely death.

The issue begins with three short introductory pieces. Fittingly the first is from Ranulph's wife, Aartje Hulstein, who has been his discussion partner in the production of many of the columns. The difficult art Ranulph practiced in his columns was that of being deep and yet easily understandable, and close to real life interaction, in a rather short text. She notes Ranulph's pleasure in learning of this festschrift, and describes the spirit in which he did his work, with an emphasis on his crafting of his regular columns for this journal.

Following this piece is an overview article by Søren Brier, which is both an introduction to Ranulph's work and a description of the author's engagement in the inspired discussions that went on from the first draft of the columns to the final version. Concluding this introductory section is a short remembrance by Mary Catherine Bateson of Ranulph and his work for the American Society for Cybernetics for which he was president his last years.

Ranulph's Ph.D. dissertation on Objects was intended by him as the foundation of his career, but it is little known even within cybernetic circles. Albert Müller has undertaken to provide us with an explication of this thesis, how it came to be and how Ranulph used its ideas in his later work.

Following Albert Müller's article are three pieces of great intellectual depth in which Ranulph's work is assessed and contextualized *in the round* (a theatrical term suggesting from many perspectives). These are philosophical pieces which are as challenging as the work deserves. Karl Müller aptly names his article, *De Profundis*, for reasons he explains in his text, and in it he illustrates Ranulph's place in the constellation of second-order cybernetics, as well as explaining his theory of Objects and his application of cybernetics in the fields of communication, learning and design. This has been a concept which has been difficult to fit into the dominant discussion. Karl Müller's piece is an interesting sociological and philosophical reflection on the interaction between a radically new creative thinking researcher and the fields he was touching—and how difficult it is, sociologically

and existentially, to formulate new insights and interdisciplinary directions in established fields of research and practices.

Dirk Baecker also touches on these issues learnedly but here in the context of the incipient cybernetics of the work of Martin Heidegger, who inspired by Schelling saw cybernetics as the fulfilling of modern science's full aspiration.

Bernard Scott explains the more direct connection of Ranulph's work with that of his teacher Gordon Pask, who developed conversation theory. It was a theory which Ranulph not only promoted but also related to his theory of Objects (and one he would have liked to have seen much more discussion about in this journal).

The pieces which follow give some emphasis to the idea of design, which was the focus of Ranulph's teaching for many decades. Hugh Dubberly and Paul Pangaro, in a concise yet profound way, demonstrate the depth and rigor of a concept of design deeply inspired by Ranulph's theory and practice. They begin, fittingly, with their conversation with Ranulph at one of his last presentations, that of the RSD3 2014 Symposium in Oslo, and they show how Ranulph's thought was still developing and refocusing even in the face of his illness.

In the following piece, Robert Martin relates the idea of design to second-order cybernetics with a focus on composition and music—indeed many people may not know that Ranulph was an experimental composer and musician. Robert Martin's piece is followed by several in which the concept of design relates to its more usual association with architecture. Gerard de Zeeuw and Rolf Hughes relate how research in architecture, both observational and non-observational, fit with Ranulph's cybernetic approach. Ben Sweeting shows the intimate correspondence between Ranulph's theory of design and its inspiration from conversation theory, in which a cybernetic practice informs both and provides both with an ethics. This is also the subject of Christiane Herr's article, which also deals with radical constructivism as an approach Ranulph found valuable in his work with design.

The issue concludes with a number of pieces which focus on Ranulph's teaching presence in his last years and particularly his work as President of the American Society for Cybernetics. Notwithstanding the somewhat personal reflections that comprise these pieces, and their relationship with the frustrating cybernetics of governance, they all retain the rigor which relates these matters to theory, specifically second-order cybernetic theory and the cybernetics of design.

There are two pieces with nearly the same title, "What I Learned from Ranulph Glanville." One of them is from a former president of the ASC and the other is from the new incumbent president who has followed Ranulph in the position. The former President is Larry Richards and he describes Ranulph's clarity of thought, commitment to listening, quiet determination, conversation (theory and practice), and concept of design. Larry Richards concludes with a conversation he would like to have had with Ranulph about the theory of government. The new President is Michael Lissack, who gives tribute to Ranulph by expanding upon a conversation the two of them had after the transfer of power (or position) from the one to the other. The conversation was on the subject of stridency and polarization, a topic on which Michael Lissack expands theoretically at some length.

The next two pieces also focus on specific conversations with Ranulph. Thomas Fischer in "Designing Together" describes specific conversations on the topic of mutual design, and an example is given of the logo and diagram for the 2013 ASC conference. The conversation here includes much that took place in email, including after Ranulph became ill. Philip Baron in a piece called "Glanville's Consistency" departs from the usual academic format to show Ranulph in a direct relation of conversation, including a dialogue about therapy that became pivotal in Philip Baron's life. It shows Ranulph not only in theory but also as a person.

Finally there is a short reflection on "My Time with Ranulph Glanville" by the youngest contributor, Thomas Fischer's and Christiane Herr's daughter Lily—with some help from her parents.

It is an existential view of the person Ranulph, seen through the eyes of a young child.

Lou Kauffman's regular column for this issue is his own version of a tribute to Ranulph, one which gives the Cookie and Parabel treatment—readers of the column will know these to be Kauffman's interlocutory alter egos—to a joint paper written by Ranulph Glanville and Francisco Varela, entitled "Your Inside is Out and Your Outside is In." The treatment is based on G. Spencer-Brown's *Laws of Form*.

This ends the festschrift.

We have also included an ASC column by Robert Martin. In it, as he states, he considers the failure of second-order cybernetics, radical constructivism, and the biology of condition to be fully accepted in science, and considers the opportunities that still exist for these ways of thinking in the cultural and intellectual world.

Also there are two book reviews from Phillip Guddemi. The first is about the new book by Ronald R. Kline, *The Cybernetics Moment, or Why We Call Our Age the Information Age*. Ronald Kline is the Bovay Professor in History and Ethics of Engineering at Cornell University. His book is, in part, an ambitious recounting of the history of cybernetics, beginning with Weiner and the Macy Conferences. But counterpointed to this is a study of how the idea of an information age has had such great appeal that it has in many ways overshadowed the cybernetics from which it was born.

The second book review discusses a book from the biosemiotician (and novelist) Victoria N. Alexander. The book's title, *The Biologist's Mistress*, refers to a comment attributed to the eminent biologist J. B. S. Haldane about teleology: "Biology cannot live without her but is unwilling to be seen with her in public." Dr. Alexander has chosen to identify openly as a teleologist and subsumes much creative thinking about complexity, systems, and biosemiotics under that category. She also discusses the history of teleology and how it can contribute to a theory of aesthetics and art.

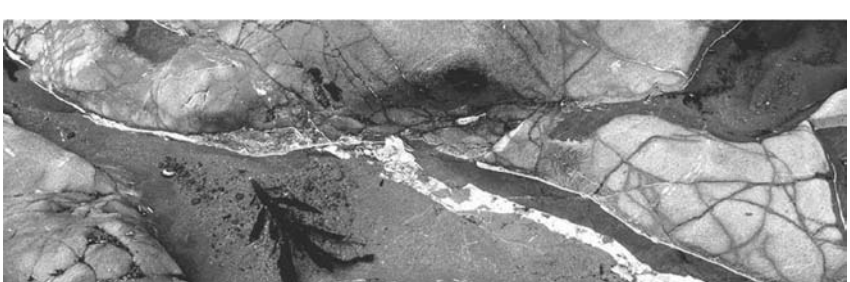
For this issue, our Festschrift to Ranulph Glanville, the featured artist is Pille Bunnell, a systems ecologist and second-order

cybernetician. Dr. Bunnell has been serving on the editorial board of the journal since she initiated an ASC column in 1999, the same year she began her three-year term as president for ASC. She served the journal as editor for the ASC column (1999 to 2012), and as art editor (2004 to 2012). Her connection with the ASC community led to many friendships and collaborations, not least of which was a deep and enduring friendship with Ranulph Glanville, whom she continued to encourage during his nearly decade long leadership, inclusive of two terms as president of the ASC.

We wish to express appreciation and respect for Glanville in part by recognizing his support for Pille's many contributions to our journal and the field of cybernetics. We also reveal a little-known side of her accomplishments by publishing herein a sampling of her luminous photographs of the natural world, which mirror her scholarship as they "explore the ramifications of reflections as they alter how we humans see ourselves and how we relate to each other and the world around us."

Bunnell's intimate relationship with the natural world as well as understanding of complex systems is revealed in her photographs. Her images show her delight in the designs found in the colors, values, shapes and textures created by water, earth, fungus, wood, and so forth. They also reflect the depth of her knowledge as a systems scientist and ecologist.

Poetry has been provided by Kathleen Forsythe. Photos of Ranulph were provided by Delmar Mavignier and Christiane M. Herr.



Bunnell, P. (2010). *Life Fell In.* Un-retouched photograph.

Living Between Cybernetics Columns

Aartje Hulstein[1]

When Søren Brier and Lou Kauffman suggested a festschrift for Ranulph after he had decided he would stop writing the columns in *Cybernetics and Human Knowing* at the end of 2014, Ranulph was very pleased.

I am very pleased to see so many people commenting on Ranulph's work, and sad at the same time as Ranulph is not here anymore to enjoy this special issue and comment on it.

Ranulph often felt people did not appreciate his work and was surprised when one of the reactions to his diagnosis and illness was an increased interest in his work and what he had to offer. He wanted to write all that he had to say and increased his effort.

I am grateful for all the visitors we had in the past year, who made it possible for Ranulph to continue with his work, develop it further and talk about his work and write the last column.

Another project he was delighted about was the filming the Royal College of Art decided to do, to capture some of the "Ranulphness" for future generations.

A very special moment was the last lecture Ranulph gave in Oslo at the end of October 2014. Tim Jachna and Thomas Fischer came to Oslo to record this and to hand over the award Ranulph and I received from the ASC at the last conference. We could not attend due to treatment, but Ranulph joined by Skype.

Søren Brier asked me to write something for this festschrift, as cybernetics has played such a big role in our life.

When Ranulph and I met in 1994 in Amsterdam he had just started to write the columns for *Cybernetics and Human Knowing*

[1] Email: aartje@glanville.co.uk

and they have been part of our life together right up till the end. Cybernetics in the form of conferences, meeting people, the American Society for Cybernetics and papers to be written was very much part of our life and work together.

Ranulph not only talked about cybernetics, but also tried to live it. He would choose a concept and think about it. When the concept became clearer he would start to share with me what he was thinking about and we would explore it together. I often asked for clarification and how I could use it in my work, our life together.

I learned to observe better, to see what it did when I was aware of the observing. Learning that I saw the world differently from everyone else, and that made me more interested in how children and specially the disabled students I worked with composed their view of the world. If only I could see the world as they did for one moment, how would this change the way I treated them physically.

This for me opened up a whole new world of interest in my work as a pediatric physiotherapist. I would discuss my observations with Ranulph and people we visited. Richard Jung was one of the people who played a crucial role in this, explaining a different kind of intelligence, one that is in the doing and can only be grasped by reflection. Those conversations often resulted in a different approach and interaction with the teachers and students I worked with. We tried to make movement part of the educational process and also to add lots of fun to therapy.

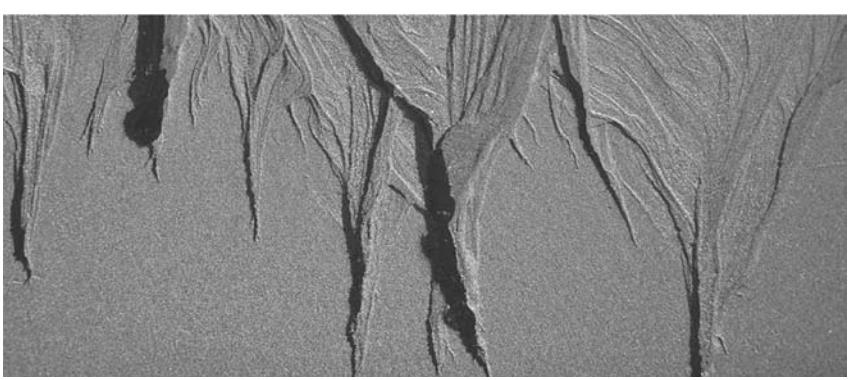
After exploring the concept, for the columns or a paper, the writing would begin, a period of immense concentration. Writing the way Ranulph did was a creative act, he would try to simplify, make the words flow and let people experience what he was writing about.

The writings, but also his lectures, always became journeys, Ranulph took people and showed them how he saw the world and how that view could help others to understand the world differently. I often read the first drafts of the columns and papers and asked more questions. The next step would be that Søren Brier or other colleagues became involved, a conversation by email

started and Ranulph would continue to rework the paper. In the end the result of those conversations was published.

Ranulph always worked in a conversational way with me and all the others he met and worked with. It did not matter whether he traveled the world, worked at universities with students and staff, gave keynote lectures, became president of the ASC and developed the new style conferences or met friends and relatives. An enormous curiosity how others thought and saw the world and engage with that was part of what made Ranulph so special. I had the privilege of observing it and taking part at the same time.

It is a credit to Ranulph and how he explained the thinking of second-order cybernetics to me that it has become so close to my heart as a way of understanding the world and how to live in it. It still helps me to deal with life and see the possibilities and joy it offers.



Bunnell, P. (2006). *Sandy Glyphs.* Un-retouched photograph.

Ranulph Glanville: The Cybernetician of the Black Box of Second-order Unknowing

Søren Brier[1]

Seven years ago I wrote a little article called Ranulph Glanville: "The Cybernetician of Ignorance" (Brier, 2008). I had the famous book *Docta Ignoranta* by Nicolaus Cusanus about learned ignorance in mind, when I coined the title. I was thinking of a similarity between radical constructivism and the adage that inspired Cusanus' title, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's advice to his reader to "strive upwards unknowingly." In spite of all the knowledge we have gathered since then, it is still pretty much the situation we are in and it is a realization that is at the core of Ranulph Glanville's work.

Being pretty unknowing myself about many of Ranulph's published works, my earlier article was based on the evaluation work of Mary Catherine Bateson, Dirk Baecker and Stephen Gage, contributing to Brunel University's awarding the Doctor of Science (DSc) to Ranulph Glanville. As these evaluations were not published, I was graciously allowed by the authors to integrate their work into an article of my own to which I added a few comments on my own co-work with Ranulph in writing a column for this journal over the last twenty years. The last of these columns were published in the previous issue of *Cybernetics & Human Knowing, 22*(1) (Brier & Kauffman, 2013).

These columns were collected and republished as one of the books in the great book project by edition echoraum which

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collected Glanville's published works in a three volume set entitled *The Black B∞x* as part of the series Complexity / Design / Society. Karl Müller explains more about this huge project in his article in this festschrift.

But the story I really wanted to tell is that when I—on request—a couple of years later put this article on Academia.edu for free reading, it very quickly turned out to be the most read of my articles ever on that webpage, not only on that year but for many years. Again and again people have been searching for it on the net because of Ranulph's great influence in so many areas and because this paper gives such a good overview of his work thanks to the three referees.

In his last years Ranulph—when we discussed his retirement from contributing two columns a year to CHK—doubted that his work had any broad impact. I then showed him the statistics of this paper for a bit of comfort and he was much surprised. I promised him on the basis of that to make a festschrift for him when he retired from his lifetime work in CHK, as I was convinced that the interest in it would be enormous.

The present text is unfortunately post mortem as Ranulph was in and out of hospital while we were working on his last column, and finally did not come back. But before that period I did manage to tell him during the last month of his life that the articles to this issue were pouring in from all over the globe where he had travelled and lectured so extensively in the last decades of his life; and this seemed to give some kind of comfort to him.

I have written several papers to 70 years birthdays festschrifts in recent years, and the feeling of being alone with one's ideas and efforts is quite common among famous interdisciplinary trail blazers. I think it is partly because breaking a new interdisciplinary path means that you do not really belong to any community. You do not have obvious colleagues and you pretty much have to create your own institutions—be they journals or societies. Ranulph Glanville contributed to the birth of, and sustained, many journals and societies and edited festschrifts and proceedings for many

researchers and conferences. He was always helping and organizing, like Thomas Sebeok in semiotics. He was creating fields of inquiry and knitting networks all over the globe—in the last years not least as president of the ASC. He, much in collaboration with Louis H. Kauffman, certainly did a lot to uphold this journal that is now miraculously on its 22nd volume, floating between disciplines and societies upheld by independent interdisciplinary academics like him. CHK is a bumblebee kept in the air supported by a network of dedicated (unpaid) free-spirited academics and a wonderful publisher.

As an academic, Ranulph Glanville was amazingly idealistic and non-disciplinary in his dedication to working in the spaces between disciplines as well as between universities. He simply gave up his regular position at The Portsmouth Polytechnic School of Architectural design in 1996 when he found the institutional frames counter-productive. From then on he worked in a variety of part-time regular posts and ad hoc engagements all around the globe. This way of life seems to be the last place of existence for free academics in our post-industrial cognitive capitalist and public management society. The price of this freedom was excessive work and travel combined with global connectivity and immediate awareness. Contrary to many of my nationally-based colleagues with a steady job, I could always reach Ranulph on the net in a day or so.

We interacted in happy disagreement partly based in our different points of departure, his coming from cybernetic architecture and his apprenticeship with Gordon Pask and I from behavioural psycho-biology engaged in Gregory Bateson's work, which through my work on the Danish Journal *Paradigma* got connected to the ASC and Maturana's and von Foerster's work. The physicist Peder Voetmann Christiansen turned me on to the work of the great American pragmaticist C. S. Peirce, an engagement which through interchanges with Jesper Hoffmeyer, Claus Emmeche, Mogens Kielstrup, Kalevi Kull, and Fredrik Stjernfelt turned into biosemiotics. Anyway, over the years, Ranulph and

I continued to engage in discussion whenever he produced a column; sometimes I would involve Lou Kauffman, to draw on his expertise of Spencer-Brown as I was having similar discussions with him whenever he made his contribution. Dirk Baecker, who also had ongoing exchanges with Ranulph, is also a researcher I had exchanges with over the years encouraging his publications with CHK as these have turned out to be of great value to the sort of knowledge processes the journal has wanted to promote. So the three of us were in intense enlightening discussion over the many years Ranulph contributed to the journal and since Louis Kauffman joined us as a second columnist.

We had an inter- and transdisciplinary interest in the foundations of knowledge in common, but we were coming from very different places, keeping us enough apart to require ongoing discussion. Ranulph Glanville with his architectural design teaching background, Louis Kauffman with his logic and mathematical insight, and finally Dirk Baecker in a social communicative philosophical space deeply influenced by Niklas Luhmann's work on which he is an authority. Both Baecker and I were in dialogue with another Luhmann inspired researcher that has done a lot for keeping the quality of the journal's dialogue up; namely my local colleague Ole Thyssen, with whom I worked in the Danish Academy of Applied Philosophy. Thyssen was responsible for CHK's contact with Luhmann in the last years of his life.

No doubt it was Pierce's semiotic philosophy that kept us somewhat apart, though both Louis Kauffman and Dirk Baecker had some access to his thinking. Baecker's background in the strong German philosophical tradition also shows in his article in this issue, as well as it does in Karl Müller's. In many ways it was Spencer-Brown's work that held the group together. In a couple of issues, with Louis Kauffmann, we explored the similarities and differences between Peirce's and Spencer-Brown's metaphysics of mathematics and logic. In the previous issue John Levi Martin's article on the relation between G. Spencer-Brown's early work and

C.S. Peirce's approach to statistics continues this line of inquiry in a most interesting way.

My discussions with Ranulph Glanville focused very much on the lack of a fully reflected phenomenological viewpoint in second-order cybernetics and autopoiesis theory, starting with a critique of Bateson's "difference that makes a difference" for a cybernetic mind, and continuing into Maturana and Luhmann's work on autopoiesis. I claimed that the cybernetic mind of Bateson, as well as Maturana and Luhmann's autopoiesis and Von Foerster's Eigenforms, are not theoretically grounded in the experiential mind (Brier, 1992). What distinguishes Peirce's semiotics from cybernetics—even second-order cybernetics—is its phenomenological philosophical grounding. This point of view brought me into (healthy) disagreement with many of my Batesonian colleagues who have published in this journal.

In his very profound paper on Ranulph's work in this issue: *De Profundis: Ranulph Glanville's Transcendental Framework for Second-Order Cybernetics*, Karl Müller philosophizes on the radical constructivist movement and why Ranulph Glanville was not allowed into its hall of fame, as that movement swept over most of second-order cybernetics. I am honoured to be mentioned here, but like Maturana, von Foerster and Luhmann, I am not sure I am a radical enough to be called a radical constructivist since my main teaching effort the last 30 years has been in the philosophy of science. I still cling to a concept of truth (Brier & Kauffman, 2013) and realism through Peirce's pragmaticist semiotic fallibilism with its empirically founded never ending truth-finding process in a community of ideally engaged researchers looking for truth (Misak, 1995).[2]

But for Ranulph Glanville—like so many other cyberneticians—semiotics was an uninteresting field and they never enjoyed the

[2] See also my dialog with Louis Kauffman called "Nothing But the Truth," in the proceedings of Dirk Baecker's conference on an aspect of Spencer-Brown's work published in *CHK, 21*[1–2] (Brier & Kauffman, 2013).

profoundness of Peirce's triadic semiotic pragmaticism, though when I discussed Ranulph's last column with him I realized how close he came to Peirce's concept of semiotic objects, the semiotics net and the growth of symbols (Peirce, 1982–) in his own discussion of a new concept of "objects as wholes" and parts as "wholes with a role."

All in all Ranulph was also not very interested in discussing traditional philosophy of science and metaphysics since he considered his own groundwork on objects as a way out of the impasses of the development of traditional philosophy. In that way he was much like my semiotic and philosophy of science-oriented colleague John Deely, who in his *Four Ages of Understanding: The First Postmodern Survey of Philosophy from Ancient Times to the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* declared Charles Sanders Peirce to be the first true post-modern. Thus there are good reasons to dwell on the similarities between Spencer-Brown and Peirce's work.

In spite of Ranulph Glanville's reluctance to discuss traditional philosophy's way of formulating our problems of understanding, the knowledge and communication processes leading to truth in his last column comes very close to Leibniz's monadology, with its self-observing and autopoietic wholes that are always connected in an overall systemic harmony. When he writes about the glue that holds the wholes together, he reminded me again of Peirce's continuity philosophy, called synechism. With Peirce, Ranulph Glanville also shared a profound distinction between objects and things in the usual meaning of the word. This distinction is thoroughly explored by John Deely in his book *Purely Objective Reality*, because both Peirce and Deely prefer the pre-modern philosophical usage of *subject*, which makes it almost synonymous with thing in itself and like Ranulph Glanville tend to use *object* only in reference to the object of a sign.

This is why Deely has referred to Peirce as the first one who broke with the Cartesian tradition that dominated (and still dominates a lot of) modern philosophy, philosophy of science and much thinking

in the sciences in the area of brain science and cognitive research. Thus it also makes Ranulph a true post-modern philosopher and composer. As Peirce says (W6:37) there are two subjects that are occult and mysterious for inter- and transdisciplinary science: One is the power of nature that brings about the result of experiments in the form of causality in the material dominated universe. This is mysterious because it is unobservable in itself, but never the less we are forced by this power to admit that there must be a system of regular relations between the causes and conditions constituting the experiment and the result of it, and we can only guess what this regular relation is in itself. It is what Peirce christened as the category of Thirdness.

The other "occult and mysterious" phenomenon is the power that connects the conditions of the mathematician's diagram with the relations he observes in it. You might say that the diagram is the relations that are observable in it. Note also the role of the diagram in games like Chess, where the position of the pieces on the board is the diagram and the player must contemplate that diagram for the relations implicit in it as a locus of processes that can emerge from it. Like physical causality, the necessity of mathematical (and logical) reasoning is no less compelling than physical causality, even though mathematical objects are imagined, and no more directly observable than physical causality is. Still "all reasoning involves observation" (W6:37). There are interesting similarities between Von Foerster's idea of Eigenforms and Pierce's idea of interactions between the forms of objects.

Like Peirce, Ranulph Glanville survived and produced partly outside the traditional institutions of the nation state academia. It took nearly 50 years after Peirce's death before serious work trying to understand the wholeness of his vision of human knowing and communication was made, and the work and discussions have continued up to the recent 100-year anniversary of his death. There are many intellectual advances connected to the position of a free roaming academic. You are freer of bureaucratic, economic and political influences. Not least Pierre Bourdieu (1988) has warned

against the way the political power of the state sneaks in and forms the concepts with which we investigate our own culture. But this position can also be a hindrance of getting the results of you work out far enough around the globe. Fortunately this will not be the fate of Ranulph Glanville's work as his most important works recently have been gathered and published by edition echoraum, making the study of his legacy so much easier.

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